

Colorado

Examining New Partnerships and Innovative Educational Approaches for a Comprehensive Cancer Control Program

Public Health Problem

Malignant melanoma (the deadliest form of skin cancer) causes more than 75% of all deaths from skin cancer in the United States. Diagnosed at an early stage, malignant melanoma can usually be cured, but if diagnosed at a late stage, it is more likely to spread and cause death. During 1993–1997, Colorado’s incidence rate for melanoma was 31% higher than the overall U.S. rate. The incidence rate for non-Hispanic white males climbed 9% between 1993 and 1997.

Evidence That Prevention Works

Exposure to the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important risk factor in the development of skin cancer; therefore, when sun protection measures are used consistently, skin cancer is largely preventable.

Program Example

A public education campaign that included the brochure “Sun Smart Tips” was launched in June 2001. This campaign resulted from a unique partnership between the state health department’s Comprehensive Cancer Prevention and Control Program and Mesa Verde National Park, which has about 600,000 visitors annually. National park officials educated Colorado residents, as well as visitors from all over the world, about the steps they can take to be safer in the sun. The goal of this campaign was to educate park visitors about the need to protect themselves from the damaging rays of the sun and how best to prevent skin cancer. In addition to park staff handing out thousands of brochures at the park entrance gates, the rangers incorporated “Sun Smart Tips” into their regularly scheduled talks, which are held frequently throughout the year.

Implications

This project was so well received that plans are under way to make the skin cancer brochures and information available at Colorado’s highway visitors’ centers. Thousands of travelers can potentially be reached with important sun safety messages. This effort also underscores the added value of coordinated partnerships to disseminate consumer-oriented information on cancer prevention.